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News Pieces to a CIA Puzzle

The CIA connection that has plagued the American press for so long will not go away. It is like a jigsaw puzzle left neglected on a card table. Every once in a while somebody wanders by and fits in another piece.

The latest piece—or what purports to be a piece—of the puzzle has cropped up in the current issue of *Penthouse* magazine, of all places. Two young reporters say that a year-long investigation disclosed that the Copley News Service, a subsidiary of the Copley Press, worked long and closely with the Central Intelligence Agency.

The reporters, Joe Trento and Dave Roman, claim they learned from CIA sources that no fewer than 23 Copley News Service employees worked secretly for the CIA over a 20-year period. The news service specialized in Latin American coverage.

Just a few weeks ago another piece of the puzzle was slipped into place by Richard S. Salant, president of CBS News. He disclosed that in the 1950s and early 1960s CBS News worked closely with the CIA, letting the agency monitor unaired films and correspondents' reports and debrief foreign correspondents.

We can expect more of the same. The CIA had, at one time or another, "relationships" with at least 50 American media people, a good many of whom received money for their clandestine activities. It is also known that more than a dozen American news organizations and publishing houses were used, most of them knowingly, as covers for CIA agents abroad. Obviously the jigsaw puzzle is far from complete.

The CIA and its congressional over-

seers have given assurances that the subversion of the press, both here and abroad, has ended—or almost ended. But the details of what went on during the heyday of the collaboration have been steadfastly withheld from the public.

I said the *Penthouse* article on Copley "purports" to be a piece of the puzzle because it is too early to tell whether it will stand up. Some of the reporting is sketchy, details are missing and Copley officials have issued assorted denials.

The daily press tagged along after Trento and Roman, but the coverage

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was limited to a rehash of what they said and a reporting of the denials, with a little background thrown in.

A staff member of the Senate Intelligence Committee told me it is safe to assume that the committee will look into the Copley matter. But on the basis of past experience, there is little reason to hope that much hard information will come from that. Congressional reports on such matters tend to deal in broad generalities. Names and other specifics are felt to be in poor taste.

In addition to alleging CIA ties, the *Penthouse* article asserts that the Copley organization worked closely with the FBI, channeling information and pictures to the agency and publishing items the agency wanted published.

That could open another large can of worms for the media. In J. Edgar Hoover's palmy days the FBI may have been even more skillful than the CIA in

using the press for its own purposes.

Why all the concern over past relationships between the press and federal intelligence and law-enforcement agencies? The reason can be found in the constitutional guarantee of a free press.

A press that lets itself be used as a tool by the government, however patriotic that may seem at the moment, is not a free press. It is a captive press to the extent it is used, and to that extent it is incompatible with the needs of a free society. Even if the press has now shaken off all the ties that bound it, the public still has a right to know the extent and details of the captivity. And the press, if it is truly free, has the responsibility to report them.

From a news business point of view, one of the most important—and embarrassing—passages in the *Penthouse* article is the last paragraph.

Trento and Roman charge that the Copley management tried to gag a special writer in its employ who was working for full disclosure of journalists who collaborated with the CIA. They close the article by quoting the writer as saying:

"If the press had fought for disclosure of collaborating journalists as diligently as they fought to find out what happened in Watergate, this issue would have been settled a long time ago."

Truer words were never spoken. And in view of that lack of journalistic zeal, there is a certain rough justice in the "serious" press's having to follow up on a story that first saw light in a publication whose main stock in trade is penda in living color.